

Title of Book "The Spy Who Came In from the Cold"
 Author John Le Carré

Book Reviews (62-46855)

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*Book previously read
by Miss Harriet Trotter
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The Brutal Business of Espionage

By ORVILLE PRESCOTT

THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD.
By John Le Carré. 256 pages. Coward-McCann. \$4.50.

AT 50 Alec Leamas was old for operational work. He had been working in Berlin for a long time, perhaps too long. At first he had obtained excellent results, but now that a series of deaths had eliminated all the important members of his network in the German Democratic Republic it was not surprising that he was summoned back to London.

Tough, clever, contemptuous of instructions and worn by brutal experience into a state of angry cynicism, Alex was about ready to retire from the organization. A man can't go on being a secret agent indefinitely. If only he had some money he would quit. How Alec tried to earn a tidy nest egg on one last dangerous operation is the story told by John Le Carré in his "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold."

Graham Greene, who has written several of the best spy stories of modern times, says that this is the best spy story he has ever read. It may be the best anybody has ever read. The verdict, of course, depends on one's taste in these matters. Those who enjoy glamour, sex, impudent daring and masterful heroics in their spy stories may not care for "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold."

But this cold-blooded tale's harsh emphasis on the ruthlessness, treachery and deliberate frightfulness of contemporary espionage should fascinate and appall hordes of admiring readers. And while they shudder over the double and triple crosses of Mr. Le Carré's superbly intricate plot they will find that its slow start, accelerating pace and final explosive denouement leave them limp from excitement.

John Le Carré is the pseudonym of a British civil servant employed in one of the Whitehall ministries. Whether he has had personal experience of intelligence operations is an intriguing question. If he hasn't, he should be recruited at once by some sinister hush-hush outfit. He has the ability to imagine the most devilish conspiracies and a thorough respect for practical details.

Since each step of Mr. Le Carré's plot is surprising in itself, it is no easy task to suggest what it is all about without revealing too much. Perhaps it will be sufficient to say that Alex Leamas's last operation required him to assume the part of a disgruntled defector. That wasn't too difficult, for Alec was a talented actor. But maintaining his assumed personality while dealing with enemy agents was harder. It was still harder to keep up the deception while being interrogated, beaten and tried for his life in Eastern Germany.

There are numerous conclusions, none of them pleasant, to be drawn from reading "The Spy Who Came in From the Cold." One

is that a secret agent has no business loving anybody, particularly not loving a girl foolish enough to have joined the Communist party. Another is that a spy has nearly as much reason to fear his superiors in his own organization as the members of the opposition. Another is that any given plan is probably much more complicated and much more dangerous to operate than the spy suspects.

Alec's boss had some interesting ideas about espionage: "We do disagreeable things, but we are *defensive*. That, I think, is still fair. We do disagreeable things so that ordinary people here and elsewhere can sleep safely in their beds at night. Is that too romantic? Of course, we occasionally do very wicked things. And, in weighing up the moralities, we rather go in for dishonest comparisons; after all, you can't compare the ideals of one side with the methods of the other, can you, now?"

"I mean, you've got to compare method with method, and ideal with ideal. I would say that since the war our methods—ours and those of the opposition—have become much the same. I mean you can't be less ruthless than the opposition simply because your Government's *policy* is benevolent, can you, now?"

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